



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

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MAY 3, 2005

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FORMER KC MUNICIPAL JUDGE PLEADS GUILTY TO FRAUD FOR TAKING MONEY FROM ATTORNEYS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a former Kansas City, Mo., municipal court judge pleaded guilty in federal court today to a fraud scheme that involved soliciting money from attorneys and others, including attorneys with cases in which she presided.

Deborah A. Neal, 54, of Kansas City, waived her right to a grand jury and pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Howard F. Sachs this afternoon to a federal information that charges her with mail fraud. **Neal** was appointed as a Municipal Court Judge for Kansas City on May 17, 1996, and resigned from that position on Nov. 3, 2004.

“**Neal** admitted today that she received more than \$28,000 from attorneys and a bonding company,” Graves said. Beginning soon after she was appointed to the municipal bench and continuing until August 2004, **Neal** solicited and received personal loans from attorneys, including attorneys who had cases over which she presided. She also received a personal loan from at least one bonding company which wrote appearance bonds for defendants appearing in cases over which she presided.

Neal solicited approximately \$30,000 in such loans, received approximately \$28,000 in loans, and had repaid less than \$10,000, leaving approximately \$18,000 in unpaid loans at the time of her resignation. **Neal** also admitted that she solicited and received other monetary benefits from attorneys, including tickets for concerts and sporting events. Some attorneys, Graves said, felt compelled to make the loans to **Neal** out of fear of economic harm to themselves or their clients.

“The public expects judges to be fair and impartial, and rightly holds them to a high standard,” Graves said. “It’s not a level playing field when the judge takes money from some attorneys and bonding companies, while others are playing by the rules.

“**Neal** violated the most basic tenets of justice when she sought financial favors from attorneys appearing in her courtroom. She not only violated the law and her professional code of ethics, but she demeaned her office and betrayed the public trust.”

Graves explained that **Neal** has been charged with fraud because she devised a scheme to defraud citizens by depriving them of the right to the honest services of Kansas City municipal court judges.

“Such conduct undermines the rule of law and erodes the public’s confidence in the judicial system,” Graves said. “We will aggressively prosecute those who seek to profit from injustice. The judicial system for which **Neal** showed such contempt will now hold her accountable for her actions.”

In addition to soliciting and receiving loans, **Neal** also admitted that she gave preferential treatment to certain attorneys and their clients.

On one occasion, **Neal** used her ruling in a case as an opportunity to solicit and receive a loan from an attorney who had been charged as a defendant with a municipal ordinance violation. In November 2002, a case in which the defendant was an attorney was transferred to her division. “**Neal** found that defendant not guilty after presiding over the trial,” Graves said. “A few months later, she solicited and received a \$5,000 loan from that defendant – a loan she never repaid.”

Neal also admitted that she caused certain criminal cases to be transferred from the dockets of other judges to her, and changed conditions of probation for the defendants represented by attorneys who had made loans to her. Some attorneys who made loans to **Neal** were granted unescorted access to what is supposed to be a secure area leading to the municipal judges’ chambers.

The federal information also alleges that, in the spring of 2000, **Neal** dismissed approximately 41 traffic citations that had been issued to a defense attorney. “This was done without the knowledge or consent of the city prosecutor,” Graves said, alleging that **Neal** fraudulently caused the computer number of an assistant city prosecutor to be entered on the dismissal of these traffic citations on a date on which the assistant prosecutor was not working.

The specific act of mail fraud to which **Neal** pleaded guilty today, Graves explained, involves the Public Report of Extra-Judicial Income that she mailed from Kansas City to the Clerk of the Missouri Supreme Court in Jefferson City, Mo., on April 16, 2001. As a municipal judge, **Neal** was required by the state’s Code of Judicial Conduct to report any loans over \$100 in the annual Public Reports of Extra-Judicial Income. That 2001 report had the material omission of at least one loan over \$100 – a \$5,000 loan **Neal** received from an attorney who sometimes practiced before her.

Neal also omitted the loans from court filings when she filed for bankruptcy in June 2000, Graves added, and tried to conceal those loans from others – including prosecuting attorneys, other attorneys practicing before her (who had not made loans to her), other judges in whose cases she sometimes made rulings, other bonding companies, and parties not represented by attorneys who had made loans to her, none of whom were party to the loan scheme, and were unaware of her real or potential conflicts of interest in cases pending before her.

Under federal statutes, **Neal** could be subject to a sentence of up to five years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$250,000. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled after the completion of a presentence investigation by the United States Probation Office.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney J. Daniel Stewart. It was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at
www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow